

Tidal Structure in Galactic Satellites

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Disclaimer

The work described in this thesis is that of the candidate alone, with the exception of the radial velocities in Chapter 3, which were derived by G. Da Costa. The photographic image in Chapter 2 was constructed by David Malin.

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Abstract

The dynamical histories of three Galactic satellite systems have been investigated. These include the Fornax and Sculptor dwarf spheroidal galaxies, and the globular cluster ω Centauri. Wide-field CCD photometry was obtained for these objects in two colours, V and I , covering a total sky area of 30 square degrees. These data were used to construct a colour-magnitude diagram for each system, which then provided a filter to select probable member stars. This technique reduced contamination from foreground stars, allowing a comprehensive examination of the poorly-known outer regions of these three Galactic satellites.

An initial analysis of the central region of Fornax was made using the deep photometric data provided by Stetson et al. The analysis revealed a shell-like feature located approximately 1.5 core radii southeast from the centre of the dwarf galaxy, with an integrated luminosity of $M_V \sim -4$. The colour-magnitude data for this shell indicate it to be dominated by stars with an age ~ 2 Gyr.

The complete analysis of Fornax utilised two colour data covering a $3.2^\circ \times 3.2^\circ$ area on the sky. The colour-magnitude selection technique revealed a second shell-like feature situated 1.3° northwest from the Fornax centre, approximately $30'$ beyond the nominal tidal radius at this position angle. This feature displays an integrated luminosity of $M_V \sim -7$. The alignment of this second shell is parallel to the original shell, and both are situated on the minor axis. Additionally, a statistical analysis of the extra-tidal region of Fornax revealed two large, faint surface brightness structures located on the minor axis. These structures, combined with the two shells, present strong evidence for shell structure in Fornax. This is the first such structure observed in a dwarf galaxy, and implies that Fornax has experienced a merger event in the recent past.

The photometric survey of Sculptor was complete to the depth of the horizontal branch stars. The red horizontal branch stars were found to be significantly more concentrated than the blue horizontal branch stars. An analysis of the distribution of red giant branch-selected stars revealed no significant extra-tidal structure. To further test this result, spectra at far red wavelengths were obtained for over 700 candidate red giant stars over the 10 deg^2 region using the 2dF instrument on the Anglo-Australian Telescope. Radial velocities and metallicities for these stars were measured using Ca II triplet lines, providing additional constraints to select Sculptor members beyond the nominal tidal radius. The distribution of the 179 probable Sculptor members indicated a lack of extra-tidal stars. These results support, at most, a mild level of interaction between this system and the Galaxy. An upper mass limit for extra-tidal material was measured to be 10% of the Sculptor luminous mass.

The analysis of ω Centauri was similar to that of Sculptor. V and I band

photometry was obtained to search for the tidal tails proposed by a previous study. As noted by others, dust correction was found to remove these structures. G-type spectra were obtained for approximately 4000 candidate cluster members, and radial velocities were used to distinguish members from field stars. A total of 24 probable members of ω Cen were found in the extra-tidal regions. Hence, if ω Cen does possess tidal tails, then they comprise at most 1% of the cluster mass.

Contents

Disclaimer	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xv
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Dwarf Galaxies	2
1.2 Globular Clusters	3
2 Fornax	7
2.1 Introduction	7
2.1.1 Stellar Population and Chemical Enrichment	7
2.1.2 Structure	9
2.1.3 Kinematics and Dark Matter	9
2.1.4 This Survey	10
2.2 Initial Analysis – The SE Shell	11
2.2.1 Results	12
2.2.2 Discussion	17
2.3 Observations and Data Reduction	19
2.3.1 Reduction	22
2.4 Photometry	25
2.4.1 Photometric Calibration	26
2.4.2 Completeness	35
2.5 Results	47

2.5.1	Radial Profile	53
2.6	Outer Structure	55
2.6.1	Density Function	55
2.6.2	Angular Correlation Function	59
2.6.3	Dual Radial Profiles	62
2.6.4	Properties of the NW Shell	62
2.7	Inner Structure	65
2.7.1	Radial Dependence of Structure	65
2.8	Discussion	68
2.8.1	Alternative Scenarios	68
2.8.2	Evidence of Shell Structure	70
2.9	Conclusion	73
3	Sculptor	75
3.1	Introduction	75
3.1.1	Stellar Population	75
3.1.2	Structure	76
3.1.3	Kinematics and Dark Matter	77
3.1.4	This Survey	77
3.2	Photometric Survey	78
3.2.1	Observations and Data Reduction	78
3.2.2	Photometric Calibration	81
3.2.3	Completeness	84
3.3	Spectroscopic Survey	94
3.3.1	Observations	94
3.3.2	Data Reduction and Analysis	96
3.4	Results – Photometric Survey	101
3.4.1	Extra-Tidal Structure	105
3.4.2	Inner Structure	111
3.4.3	Horizontal Branch Stars	115
3.5	Results – Spectroscopic Survey	122

3.5.1	Sculptor Membership	122
3.5.2	Extra-Tidal Candidates	127
3.6	Discussion	133
3.6.1	Inner Structure	134
3.6.2	Extra-Tidal Structure	135
3.7	Conclusion	136
4	Omega Centauri	139
4.1	Introduction	139
4.1.1	Tidal Tails	141
4.2	Photometric Survey	142
4.2.1	Observations and Data Reduction	142
4.2.2	Photometry	145
4.2.3	Results	158
4.3	Spectroscopic Survey	163
4.3.1	Data Reduction and Analysis	165
4.4	Results	168
4.4.1	Cluster Membership	169
4.5	Conclusion	176
5	Conclusion and Future Work	177

List of Figures

1.1	Palomar 5 tidal tails	5
2.1	Deep photographic image of the Fornax dSph	11
2.2	WFI data for the SE shell	13
2.3	Deep Stetson data of the Fornax central region	14
2.4	Field-subtracted CMD of the overdense region	16
2.5	Schematic map of observations	21
2.6	Bias and dark images for WFI	22
2.7	Flat fields in V and I for WFI	23
2.8	Dark sky flat fields in V and I for WFI	23
2.9	Astrometry in V	24
2.10	Astrometry in I	25
2.11	Instrumental magnitudes over WFI CCDs – V	29
2.12	Instrumental magnitudes over WFI CCDs – I	30
2.13	Fields 5/6 calibration	31
2.14	Internal accuracy of the Fornax photometry	32
2.15	October 2001 standard fields – ΔV vs time	34
2.16	October 2001 standard fields – ΔV vs airmass	35
2.17	Transformation equations solution – 20th Oct 2001	36
2.18	Fornax CMD	37
2.19	Luminosity functions for Fornax fields 1 – 16	38
2.20	Fornax CMD	47
2.21	Spatial distribution of Fornax RGB stars	48
2.22	Dust map in the Fornax region	49
2.23	Overdensity CMD	51

2.24	Fornax RGB stars down to $V = 20.7$	52
2.25	Radial profile of Fornax RGB stars	54
2.26	Probability density function	56
2.27	Outer contour plot	57
2.28	Probability density function – four quadrants	58
2.29	Correlation Function	60
2.30	Correlation Function	61
2.31	Split radial profile of Fornax RGB stars	62
2.32	Field-subtracted CMD for the NW shell	64
2.33	Fornax Contour Plot	66
2.34	Radial Dependence of Structure	67
3.1	Schematic map of observations	78
3.2	Astrometry in V	80
3.3	Astrometry in I	81
3.4	Internal accuracy of the Sculptor photometry	82
3.5	September 2002 standard fields – ΔV vs airmass	83
3.6	Transformation equations solution – September 2002	84
3.7	Sculptor CMD	85
3.8	Luminosity functions for Sculptor fields 1 – 16	86
3.9	CMD of the 2dF Scl candidate selection	95
3.10	Spatial distribution of 2dF Scl candidates	96
3.11	Ca II line strength against $V - V_{\text{HB}}$	100
3.12	Comparison of Ca II line strengths for multiply observed stars	102
3.13	Sculptor CMD selection	103
3.14	Spatial distribution of Scl RGB stars	104
3.15	Radial profile of Scl RGB stars	106
3.16	Density Distribution	107
3.17	Scl RGB dataset with superimposed 2.0σ artificial tidal tails	108
3.18	Density probability functions measured for the six artificial tidal tail datasets	109
3.19	Angular Correlation Function	111

3.20	Angular Correlation Function for the tidal tail simulations	112
3.21	Sculptor Contour Plot	113
3.22	Radial Dependence of Structure	114
3.23	Sculptor CMD HB selection	116
3.24	Spatial distribution of Scl RHB stars	117
3.25	Spatial distribution of Scl BHB stars	118
3.26	Radial profile of HB stars	119
3.27	Blueness of the HB with radius	120
3.28	Scl survey radial velocities	123
3.29	Ca II line strengths for Sculptor stars	125
3.30	Abundance distribution of Scl stars	126
3.31	Metallicity vs radius for the upper RGB Scl stars	127
3.32	Proper motion of candidate Scl stars	128
3.33	Spatial distribution of Scl spectroscopic members	129
3.34	CMD of Scl spectroscopic members	132
4.1	Schematic map of observations	144
4.2	Astrometry in V	145
4.3	Astrometry in I	146
4.4	Internal accuracy of the ω Cen photometry	147
4.5	Transformation equations solution – April 2002	148
4.6	ω Cen CMD	149
4.7	Luminosity functions for ω Cen fields 1 – 15	150
4.8	ω Cen CMD	158
4.9	ω Cen CMD	159
4.10	ω Cen contour diagrams – with and without reddening correction	161
4.11	Radial profile	162
4.12	Probability density function	163
4.13	CMD and spatial distribution of the 2dF candidates	164
4.14	Radial velocity differences from multiply observed stars	166
4.15	Line strengths for multiply observed stars	167

4.16	Velocity distribution	168
4.17	Velocity histograms at expanding annuli	169
4.18	Line strengths for velocity-selected stars	171
4.19	Proper motion of candidate ω Cen stars	172
4.20	CMD of ω Cen spectroscopic members	173
4.21	Spatial distribution of probable cluster members	174

List of Tables

2.1	Fornax observations	20
2.2	Calibration values for WFI CCDs	29
2.3	Internal photometry adjustments to match F10	32
3.1	Sculptor photometric observations	79
3.2	Internal photometry adjustments to match Scl6	82
3.3	Sculptor 2dF observations	95
3.4	King model parameters	105
3.5	BHB field-recovery statistics	117
3.6	Candidate extra-tidal Scl stars — photometric properties	130
3.7	Candidate extra-tidal Scl stars — spectroscopic properties	131
4.1	ω Cen photometric observations	143
4.2	Internal photometry adjustments to match ω C8	146
4.3	Spectral line and continuum bandpasses	166
4.4	Properties of the candidate ω Cen extra-tidal stars	175

